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UNCLAS SANAA 000583

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: ADEN JEWISH CEMETERY IN STATE OF DISREPAIR, HELP  
NEEDED

REF: 2005 SANAA 1549

1. This is an action request. Please see paragraph 6.

2. (SBU) Summary. In February, post received a letter from a contact stating his concerns over the possible destruction of a Jewish cemetery in Aden. The contact claimed that unknown individuals had destroyed a section of the wall surrounding the cemetery and planned to confiscate the land for their personal use. Visits by emboffs to the cemetery and discussions with a variety of contacts uncovered no information to substantiate the claim of an imminent takeover. Emboffs did discover, however, that the Jewish cemetery is in a serious state of disrepair following years of neglect and periodic desecration. Post plans to approach the Aden Governor to discuss plans to rebuild the crumbling cemetery wall. Post also recommends Department approach organizations who could provide technical or financial assistance to preserve the abandoned cemetery. End Summary.

3. (SBU) In February, the Ambassador received a letter from a concerned contact, claiming that unknown individuals had destroyed a large section of the surrounding wall of a Jewish cemetery in the Mallah neighborhood of Aden. The contact believed the individuals planned to build upon the land if no one reacted to the wall's destruction. As there is no longer a Jewish community in Aden, he worried that without intervention, the only remaining Jewish cemetery in Aden would be lost.

4. (SBU) On February 27, emboffs visited the cemetery and spoke with several local officials to evaluate the contact's claims. Emboffs could find no evidence of an imminent takeover. The cemetery appears, however, to be suffering from years of neglect. (Note: There are only 300 - 400 Jews still living in Yemen, down from an estimated 60,000 in 1948 before a mass migration to Israel (reftel). End Note). The wall has fallen down completely in several areas, leaving large sections open and unguarded. During a previous visit by another emboff, it was evident that some of the tombstones had been intentionally knocked over and defaced. Many of the old tombstones are also suffering from neglect and have begun to crumble. According to the International Jewish Cemetery Project, some of the tombstones date back to 1741.

5. (SBU) The Ministry of Religious Guidance and Endowment provides a part-time guard on the premise, as is the practice for all Yemeni cemeteries. In reality, however, this guard is rarely seen on the premises. No individual or organization currently performs any maintenance on the cemetery itself or the surrounding wall. The owner of the land immediately adjacent to the largest break in the wall, which the contact claimed had been destroyed, has begun to build a small rock wall to delineate his property. He does not appear to have any plans to build over cemetery land, as he is already building a house some distance back from the wall.

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Action Request  
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6. (SBU) Post plans to approach the Aden Governor to encourage the rebuilding of the cemetery wall. Few groups in Yemen, however, have the technical expertise or the financial ability to restore the abandoned and dilapidated cemetery. Post recommends Department approach a group such as the International Jewish Cemetery Project or the Association of Jewish Yemenites in the United States, who may be able to provide assistance through the Ministry of Religious Guidance to preserve this important part of Yemen's religious heritage. Khoury